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LB 357

will, and I pray it so. When you compare our judicial salaries to those of judges in other states and the comparison ranking of all states, we rank 31st at the present time. If it be your will to advance LB 357 our ranking will remain the same--31st. I think, in other words, that we are not overly aggressively pushing this issue. I think it is important that we continue to maintain our position and, hopefully, at appropriate times in terms of our economy we can increase. Because on a comparative basis, our judges are paid below average and their caseloads are above average, and it's that simple. For instance, in 1999, the caseload of our appellate judges was 202 filed appeals per judge. That's the ninth highest. In other words, only eight other states have their judges sitting in judgment on more appeal cases than do we, and yet I've told you where we rank in terms of pay. Pay is not the whole story but pay is important to retention and qualification of the judiciary. When we look at our trial court level we find that our justices are, in comparison to many states, handling 30 percent more cases based on a comparison of filings per 100,000 people. For instance, you have a state such as Massachusetts, and, yes, I picked it because it dramatically illustrates the point I want to make, but the trial judges in Massachusetts are paid at the level of 12th in the nation and they are responsible for, on a per judge basis or per 100,000 population basis, they are responsible for 7,000 fewer filings. Those are dramatic numbers. Our judges have a greater than average caseload. They are paid below the midpoint, less than average, in comparison to other judges, and I urge that we continue to make progress on this situation by the advancement of LB 357. I'll just tell you that these increases are not out of line with those which are being given to other state employees, to legislative employees, and certainly they're less than occur in some areas of government such as State Law Enforcement bargaining units and our University of Nebraska employees. I respectfully suggest that the pay increase is warranted in order to ensure the quality of justice in Nebraska; that the rate is not abusive or inappropriate and that it is what in fact we ought to do. I would urge the advancement of LB 357. Thank you.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Mr. Clerk, amendment to the bill?